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RESTITUTION, RETURN, REPATRIATION AND
REPARATION (THE 4Rs) IN AFRICA: REALITY
OR TRANSCULTURAL APHASIA?

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MIASA Working Paper No 2023(2)

University of Ghana, Legon
September 2023



MIASA Working Papers 2023(2)

Edited by the
Merian Institute for Advanced Studies in Africa (MIASA)
Section Editor: Susann Baller

The MIASA Working Paper series serves to disseminate the research results of work in progress prior to publication in order to encourage the exchange of ideas and academic debate. The objective of the series is to publish research findings from the work of the MIASA Interdisciplinary Fellow Groups (IFGs) and other MIASA fellows in an open-access manner. Inclusion of a paper in the MIASA Working Paper Series does not constitute publication and should not limit publication in any other location. Copyright remains with the authors.

This Working Paper 2023(2) collects the findings of MIASA's fifth Interdisciplinary Fellow Group (IFG 5) on "The 4Rs in Africa: Reality or Transcultural Aphasia?", which was hosted by MIASA from 1 September to 31 December 2021. The IFG 5 comprised two conveners, Stefanie Michels and Gertrude Aba Mansah Eyifa-Dzidzienyo, and three additional members, Kokou Azamede, Martin Doll and Jakob Zollmann. The research leading to these results has received funding from the Maria Sibylla Merian Centres Programme of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Germany, under grant no. 01UK2024A, with co-funding from the University of Ghana.

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To cite: Gertrude Aba Mansah Eyifa-Dzidzienyo, Stefanie Michels et al., Restitution, Return, Repatriation and Reparation (The 4Rs) in Africa: Reality or Transcultural Aphasia?, MIASA Working Paper No 2023(2), online: hyperlink.



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Restitution, Return, Repatriation and Reparation (The 4Rs) in Africa: Reality or Transcultural Aphasia?

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Abstract

The topic of restitution of cultural materials in colonial contexts raises historical, political, and moral questions. This working paper summarizes the research findings of IFG 5 at MIASA, which moved the academic and political debates about restitution to more practical and epistemological levels. L'IFG 5 focused on one evolving restitution case study from the Akpini Traditional Area in Kpando (Ghana) demanding the return of their royal regalia from Germany, and it analysed the field within which the case unfolds. This paper, which is based on field research involving meetings and discussions with representatives from the Akpini Traditional Area, multiplies the voices/narratives of interest groups on local, national and international levels; widens the perspectives on the issues; and interrogates the ongoing limited multi-practices of restitution, return, repatriation and reparation (the 4Rs) in the post-colonial African context. The paper identifies a plethora of interest groups in the restitution case in Kpando with varying agendas. It concludes that the field of "restitution" is characterized by interest groups that do not conform to a simplified dichotomous vision and that their agendas go beyond the mere return of cultural materials.

Keywords: Akpini, Germany, Ghana, restitution, cultural materials

Résumé

Le thème de la restitution des biens culturels issus des contextes coloniaux soulève des questions historiques, politiques et morales. Cette étude résume les résultats de la recherche de l'IFG 5 du MIASA, qui a transposé les débats académiques et politiques sur la restitution à des niveaux plus pratiques et épistémologiques. L'IFG 5 s'est focalisé sur une étude de cas de restitution en cours de l'Akpini Traditional Area de Kpando (Ghana), qui demande le retour de ses regalia royaux d'Allemagne, et a analysé le domaine dans lequel l'affaire se déploie. La présente étude, qui s'appuie sur une recherche de terrain comprenant des rencontres et des discussions avec des représentants de l'Akpini Traditional Area, multiplie les voix et les récits des groupes d'intérêt aux niveaux local, national et international, élargie les points de vue sur les questions et interroge les multi-pratiques limitées de restitution, de retour, de rapatriement et de réparation (les 4R) dans le contexte africain postcolonial. L'article identifie une pléthore de groupes d'intérêt dans le cas de restitution de Kpando ayant des agendas différents. Elle conclut que le domaine de la "restitution" est caractérisé par des groupes d'intérêt qui ne se conforment pas à une vision dichotomique simplifiée et que leurs agendas vont au-delà du simple retour des biens culturels.

Mots-clés: Akpini, Allemagne, Ghana, restitution, biens culturels



Acknowledgement

The research leading to the results presented in this working paper has received funding from the Maria Sibylla Merian Centres Programme of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Germany, under the grant no. 01UK2024A. We acknowledge the support of MIASA, which is co-funded by the University of Ghana, Legon, Accra. The working paper reflects the work of the IFG 5 fellows (Azamede, Doll, Eyifa-Dzidzienyo, Michels, Zollmann). We would like to thank Charlotte Wrigley-Asante and Susann Baller for their very useful comments on an earlier version of this paper and throughout the research period. On 16 June 2022, the IFG 5 conveners presented a summary of the research outcomes at the MIASA symposium on “Restitution and Reparation Issues in Ghana: Experiences from the Past – Perspectives for the Present and Future”. On 12–13 September 2022, four IFG 5 members, principal investigator Mirjam Brusius and two visiting researchers of IFG 5 (David Simo and Sarah Czirr) presented their research at a workshop on “Epistemologies of Restitution – Transcultural Aphasia?”, organized by the German Historical Institute Paris with the support of the Max Weber Foundation. This meeting allowed for final revisions of the working paper.



I. Prologue

Whenever the term “restitution” is employed, a dichotomy is evoked. Cultural material is present in one location and absent in another.¹ Attesting to and reflecting this fundamental dichotomy our interdisciplinary research group on “The 4Rs (Restitution, Return, Repatriation and Reparation) in Africa: Reality or Transcultural Aphasia? (International Fellow Group 5) at the Merian Institute for Advanced Studies in Africa (MIASA) hosted at the University of Ghana, hereinafter IFG 5, aimed at opening up the currently dominating dichotomous visions of the restitution debate.

In 2018, MIASA had already initiated a conference on restitution² and has expressed its continued interest in the topic reframing it as a field that can contribute to debates on governance. Working together over a four-months period (September–December 2021) at MIASA, IFG 5 focused on one evolving restitution case study from Kpando, Ghana and how it unfolds in the field of restitution. The aim of the IFG 5 was to probe how the fundamental dichotomy produced by the restitution debate plays out in a broader framework. The Fellow Group was co-convened by Gertrude Aba Mansah Eyifa-Dzidzienyo (Department of Archaeology and Heritage Studies, University of Ghana) and Stefanie Michels (Department of Historical Sciences, University of Düsseldorf). Further fellows of the group were Kokou Azamede (Department of German Studies, University of Lomé, Togo), Martin Doll (Media and Cultural Studies, University of Düsseldorf) and Jakob Zollmann (Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin). Two Principal investigators were supporting the IFG 5: Wazi Apoh (University of Ghana)³ and Mirjam Brusius (German Historical Institute London).

II. History of restitution debates

The restitution or return of cultural materials to their previous owner, whether looted in war (or in other violent contexts) or otherwise obtained, is a political gesture that has been practised throughout recorded history.⁴ However, with the advent of demands for decolonization in the first half of the 20th century, calls from the formerly colonized countries for

¹ Cf. Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin, “Provenienzforschung zwischen politisierter Wahrheitsfindung und systemischem Ablenkungsmanöver”, in: Thomas Sandkühler, Angelika Epple and Jürgen Zimmerer (eds.), *Geschichtskultur durch Restitution? Ein Kunst-Historikerstreit* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2021), pp. 55–78 (55–56).

² “Issues of Restitution and Repatriation of Looted and Illegally Acquired African Objects in European Museums”, online: <https://www.ug.edu.gh/mias-africa/content/international-workshop-issues-restitution-and-repatriation-looted-and-illegally-acquired> (accessed on 28 January 2022).

³ Wazi Apoh has been actively involved in this case, since he hails from the area, and had already published on it. Cf. Wazi Apoh, *Revelations of Domination and Resilience: Unearthing the buried Past of the Akpini, Akan, Germans and British at Kpando, Ghana* (Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2019); and Wazi Apoh, Unpublished report on research undertaken on the Kpando (Akpini) ethnographic ivory horn and artefacts in the Ethnologisches Museum, Berlin (2015). The latter report was not available to the members of our IFG.

⁴ Jeanette Greenfield, *The Return of Cultural Treasures*, third edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007 [1989]); e.g. Persia’s King Cyrus is said to have sent along with the Jews liberated from Babylonian exile the ritual gold and silver vessels that Nebuchadnezzar II had looted from the original Temple of Solomon in 586 BC (2 Kings 25:13, Ezra 1:9, 5:14).



restitution of those cultural materials that had been taken to Europe or North America became more insistent. With political independence such calls and (legal) claims for restitution have often become part of African and Asian cultural state policies since the 1950s. During the 1960s and 70s, these in turn resulted, on the international level, in the “developing law of cultural property”,⁵ as manifested by the setting up of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Expert Committees, which drafted the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (adopted by UNESCO in 1970) and the “Restitution of Cultural Property Illicitly Appropriated during Colonial Times and their Return to their Countries of Origin” (1974), as well as the creation in 1978 of a UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to its Countries of Origin or its Restitution in Case of Illicit Appropriation.⁶

Although a “number of [UNESCO] delegates hoped that the instrument [Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Movement] would be interpreted to encourage spontaneous returns of cultural property,”⁷ as early as 1970, it is mostly only since the 1990s and early 2000s that momentum has grown across Europe regarding such claims for restitution. Since then, politicians, academics and intellectuals, not only from the formerly colonized countries but also from Western countries, have paid greater attention than before to the postcolonial afterlives of cultural materials held in Western museums, other institutions and by private individuals.⁸

The restitution debate – as indicated above – is framed by a fundamental dichotomy of the absence versus presence of cultural material.⁹ This paper discusses how the alleged dichotomy is created by the restitution debate observed between Germany and Ghana (Ia and Ib) and how it is challenged and disrupted. Moreover, the paper focuses on a concrete

⁵ Gael M. Graham, “Protection and Reversion of Cultural Property: Issues of Definition and Justification”, *The International Lawyer*, 21, no. 3 (1987), pp. 755–793 (771).

⁶ See UNESCO, “Return and Restitution of Cultural Property”, *Museum*, 31, no. 1 (1979), pp. 59–61, online: <https://en.unesco.org/fighttrafficking/icprcp> (accessed on 28 January 2022).

⁷ Graham, “Protection and Reversion”, p. 771, FN 72.

⁸ For an “older” stocktaking of restitution efforts and an overview of the arguments see Greenfield, *The Return of Cultural Treasures*; Ekpo Eyo, “Repatriation of Cultural Heritage: The African Experience”, in: Flora Kaplan (ed.), *Museums and the Making of ‘Ourselves’: The Role of Objects in National Identity* (London: Leicester University Press, 1994), pp. 330–350.

⁹ Cf. Valentin Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa. Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988); Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); David Simo, “Formen und Funktionen des Gedächtnisses der Kolonisation. Das Humboldt Forum und das postkoloniale Deutschland”, in: Thomas Sandkühler, Angelika Epple and Jürgen Zimmerer (eds.), *Geschichtskultur durch Restitution. Ein Kunst-Historikerstreit* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2021), pp. 281–300. Foundational for the critique of this dichotomy: Frederick Cooper, Ann Laura Stoler (eds.), *Tensions of Empire. Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), and Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).



example, the “field”¹⁰ of the specific restitution case of Kpando (II and III) and its wider context in Ghana and beyond.

a) The restitution debate in Germany

In Germany the debate about the restitution of cultural material from “colonial contexts”¹¹ follows an earlier and ongoing debate about the restitution of cultural material within the context of the so-called “Third Reich”, the Holocaust and the Second World War. After 1945, the “Aryanization” of Jewish property and the systematic expropriation of the property of European Jews in Nazi Germany and in German-occupied Europe gave rise to numerous claims for restitution throughout Europe. The victims of expropriation and their heirs often encountered denial and stiff resistance in post-war societies to any serious restitution of Jewish property. The (partial) restitution to their owners and heirs of looted art, whether held by public museums or individuals, was mostly only realized after 1990.¹²

In fact, in Germany the term “looted art” or “*Beutekunst*” was for a long time reserved in public usage for cultural materials having been brought to the Soviet Union after the Second World War and never returned, although claimed back by the Federal Republic of Germany. In the 1950s, and since 1992, the Soviet Union and Russia, respectively, have returned a number of cultural materials to Germany but around 1,000,000 items are still missing.¹³ It took decades to remind Germans that they were not only claimants, but that others (e.g. formerly colonized people) had open claims – against German museums – too.

One milestone in this process was the book *Nofretete wants to go home: Europe as the Treasure Chamber of the Third World* published in 1984 by one of West Germany’s largest publishing houses, C. Bertelsmann,¹⁴ reminding a broader readership of debates going on in African postcolonial states at both a governmental and a societal level. However, this book’s unmistakable message that such return is a legal and moral imperative was received even in the liberal press and among museum officials rather negatively; or it

¹⁰ We have identified a transcultural “field” of restitution with implicit reference to Bourdieu’s theory of the field in which heterogeneous actors are positioned and strive for resources (in Bourdieu’s terminology “capital”: economic, cultural, social or symbolic), cf. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984).

¹¹ The term “colonial context” was defined and institutionalized as the restitution debate gained momentum in Germany post-2017.

¹² See Constantin Goschler, Martin Dean and Philipp Ther (eds.), *Robbery and Restitution: The Conflict over Jewish Property in Europe* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007); Matthias Weller, Nicolai B. Kemle, Thomas Dreier and Karolina Kuprecht (eds.), *Raubkunst und Restitution – Zwischen Kolonialzeit und Washington Principles* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2020).

¹³ See Konstantin Akinscha and Grigori Koslow, *Beutekunst. Auf Schatzsuche in russischen Geheimdepots* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch-Verlag, 1995); online: <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/bundesregierung/bundeskanzleramt/staatsministerin-fuer-kultur-und-medien/kultur/rueckfuehrung-von-beutekunst> (accessed 31 January 2022).

¹⁴ Gert von Paczensky and Herbert Ganslmayr, *Nofretete will nach Hause: Europa – Schatzhaus der “Dritten Welt”* (München: C. Bertelsmann, 1984).



was simply ignored.¹⁵ Simultaneously, academic research into the historical entanglement of colonialism and modern (social) sciences and museums began to be published.¹⁶

Today, after around 60 to 70 years of more pronounced demands by African and other scholars, as well as activists in favour of the restitution of African cultural materials, and after perhaps 40 to 50 years of an increasing awareness among European scholars and activists of these demands, it is evident that times are changing – making it hard to imagine, for example, that a historian, a museum official, or a journalist would still, like Haug von Kuenheim in 1984, claim that the question of “cultural objects from the Third World” were “an idle dispute” (*müßiger Streit*).¹⁷

For example, since 2007 the Benin Dialogue Group has organized discussions between representatives of Nigeria and major European museums holding Benin art with the aim of “bringing artifacts back to Benin City”.¹⁸ Several academic conferences have been held. Since 2010, a project of the Charité Berlin (Berlin’s foremost academic hospital) funded by the German Research Foundation has analysed the history of human remains in its own holdings, many of which originated from colonial contexts. In 2011 and 2014 the research resulted in the return of several human remains to Namibia as well in an official apology from the Charité’s director, admitting “dass hier im Namen der Wissenschaft die Gebote der Menschenwürde verletzt wurden” (that the commandments of human dignity have been violated here in the name of science).¹⁹

In a similar vein, museum staff across Germany began to consider the colonial origins of part of their holdings. The fervent debate about the reconstruction of the Hohenzollern Palace in the heart of Berlin that had occupied the German public since Germany’s reunification catapulted the holdings of the Ethnological Museum in Berlin into the centre

¹⁵ Haug von Kuenheim, “Nofretete ist kein Fall. Der müßige Streit um die Kulturschätze aus der Dritten Welt”, *Die Zeit*, 37 (7 September 1984); “Dürer nach Tokio? Gert v. Paczensky/Herbert Ganslmayr: ‘Nofretete will nach Hause’ C. Bertelmann Verlag, München”, *Der Spiegel*, 41 (7 October 1984).

¹⁶ See e.g. the works of Cornelia Esser, “Das Berliner Völkerkunde-Museum in der Kolonialära. Anmerkungen zum Verhältnis von Ethnologie und Kolonialismus in Deutschland”, in: Hans J. Reichardt (ed.), *Berlin in Geschichte und Gegenwart. Jahrbuch des Landesarchivs Berlin* (Berlin: Siedler Verlag, 1986); Manfred Gothsch, *Die Deutsche Völkerkunde und ihr Verhältnis zum Kolonialismus: Ein Beitrag zur kolonialideologischen und kolonialpraktischen Bedeutung der deutschen Völkerkunde in der Zeit von 1870 bis 1975* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1983); and now Andrew Zimmerman, *Anthropology and Antihumanism in Imperial Germany* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

¹⁷ Kuenheim, “Nofretete ist kein Fall”; “Dürer nach Tokio?”.

¹⁸ Philip Hughes, *Storytelling Exhibitions: Identity, Truth and Wonder* (London: Bloomsbury, 2001), p. 73; see Okechukwu Nwafor and Edith Ekunke, “The Nigerian National Museums and the Challenges of National Unity and Development: The Black Benz and the Return of Lost Treasures”, in: Raymond Silverman, George Abungu and Peter Probst (eds.), *National Museums in Africa: Identity, History and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2022), pp. 191–205 (202).

¹⁹ Charité Director Karl Max Einhäupl, quoted in: “Koloniales Erbe in Namibia: Charité gibt Herero-Gebeine zurück”, *Tagesspiegel* (5 March 2015), online: <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/wissen/koloniales-erbe-in-namibia-charite-gibt-herero-gebeine-zurueck/9575300.html> (accessed on 28 January 2022). Translation by the authors. See also Holger Stoecker, Thomas Schnalke and Andreas Winkelmann (eds.), *Sammeln, Erforschen, Zurückgeben? Menschliche Gebeine aus der Kolonialzeit in akademischen und musealen Sammlungen* (Berlin: Links, 2013).



of attention.²⁰ In 2002, the German Bundestag decided that these should be moved from their quite remote location in Dahlem, residential neighbourhood in Berlin, into the reconstructed palace as part of the so-called “Humboldt Forum”.²¹ In 2013, construction on site began as did anti-colonial critique of the Humboldt Forum by activist groups like “no Humboldt21”:

We demand that the work on the Humboldt Forum in the Berlin Palace be ceased and that a public debate is held: the current concept violates the dignity and property rights of communities in all parts of the world, it is Eurocentric and restorative. The establishment of the Humboldt Forum is a direct contradiction to the aim promoting equality in a migration society.²²

When art historian Bénédicte Savoy left the Advisory Board of the Humboldt Forum in 2017, this aroused much public attention in Germany.²³

Moreover, as a response to such criticism, the former German ethnological museums committed themselves in a joint declaration to returning cultural materials from formerly colonized areas. The German Museum Association published “Guidelines for German Museums Care of Collections from Colonial Contexts” in a first version in 2018. It states openly that it is a reaction of museums to “political demands”:

The German Museums Association considers it essential that the colonial past of museums and their collections be reappraised. Most museums are aware of their responsibility and willing to undertake an intensive critical analysis of the topic of colonialism. To be able to do this with the necessary professionalism and sustainability, the museums have to rely on extensive support.²⁴

As a result, individual museums like the Hamburg Museum am Rothenbaum – World Cultures and Arts (MARKK) explicitly published statements such as: “We support the return of illegally appropriated objects in our collections that are subject to a request for restitution.”²⁵ The Linden Museum in Stuttgart led the way, restituting a Bible and a whip to the Witbooi family in Namibia in March 2019. In addition, since around 2015, the number of

²⁰ Viola König, former director, calls the Humboldt Forum a catalyst. Viola König, “Das Humboldt Forum als Katalysator? Ein Blick in die Geschichte von Sammlungen und Disziplinen, Zuständigkeiten und Haltungen, Kolonialismusdebatte und Restitutionspolitik”, in: Thomas Sandkühler, Angelika Epple and Jürgen Zimmerer (eds.), *Geschichtskultur durch Restitution? Ein Kunst-Historikerstreit* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2021), pp. 301–320.

²¹ Friedrich von Bose, *Das Humboldt-Forum: Eine Ethnografie seiner Planung* (Berlin: Kadmos, 2019).

²² “Alliance ‘No-Humboldt 21’: Resolution. Moratorium for the Humboldt-Forum in the Berlin Palace”, Berlin (3 June 2013), online: <https://www.no-humboldt21.de/resolution/> (accessed on 28 January 2022).

²³ Viola König highlights the fact that Bénédicte Savoy was an art historian, since this discipline is highly visible in German cultural politics, see: König, “Das Humboldt Forum als Katalysator?”.

²⁴ Deutscher Museumsbund/ German Museums Association, *Guidelines for the Care of Collections from Colonial Contexts* (Berlin, February 2021), p. 10, online: <https://www.museumsbund.de/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/mb-leitfaden-en-web.pdf> (accessed on 28 January 2022).

²⁵ Online: <https://markk-hamburg.de/en/restitution-requests/> (accessed on 28 January 2022).



academic calls for papers on topics related to the restitution of “colonial materials” has multiplied; the publication of the conference proceedings will continue over the coming years and publicly funded research projects are on the rise.²⁶

When in 2015 Wazi Apoh from the University of Ghana was invited by the German Foreign Office together with a delegation of other scholars from those countries formerly colonized by Germany, he summarized his impressions of a “Themed Tour of German Colonial History” thus:

On the issue of restitution of objects, most German critical scholars are of the view that when it turns out that an object in any German museums has been procured through theft, plunders, or other foul means, it must be restituted without any conditions attached.²⁷

In a similar vein, in newspaper articles commenting on the inauguration of the Humboldt Forum in Berlin, where the holdings of the Ethnological Museum are displayed, journalistic assumptions are telling for the German *zeitgeist* of 2021: “Restitution ist kein Streitpunkt mehr” (Nobody questions restitution anymore).²⁸ This may be a journalistic exaggeration, and yet the steadily increasing numbers of public and academic conferences on the issue of “restitution” are also a stark reminder of this shift in perceptions between 2013 and 2021. This includes a changing moral assessment. In view of these current considerations, legal scholars, Von Bernstorff and Schuler, assumed (already in 2019) in regard to future debates: “Das ‘ob’ einer Restitution wird voraussichtlich in der neuen postkolonial geprägten Diskursformation immer weniger zur Disposition stehen, das ‘wie’ dagegen rückt derzeit stark in den Vordergrund” (“The ‘whether’ of restitution is likely to be less and less up for discussion in the new postcolonial discourse formation, while the ‘how’ is currently coming to the fore”).²⁹

This German debate is integrated into a European one, as the return of the Obelisk of Axum to Ethiopia by Italy in 2005 shows. The 2017 speech by French President Emmanuel Macron in Ouagadougou indicated a more radical change in French politics. He spoke out

²⁶ Cf. H-Soz-Kult: Fachinformation und Kommunikation für die Geschichtswissenschaften/Information and Communication Services for Historians (hsozkult.de); see among others “Provenienzforschung in außereuropäischen Sammlungen und der Ethnologie in Niedersachsen PAESE – Postkoloniale Provenienzforschung Niedersachsen”, online: <https://www.postcolonial-provenance-research.com/>; “Umgekehrte Sammlungsgeschichten. Mapping Kamerun in deutschen Museen”, online: <https://www.tu.berlin/kuk/forschung/projekte/laufende-forschungsprojekte/umgekehrte-sammlungsgeschichten-mapping-kamerun-in-deutschen-museen>; “The Restitution of Knowledge”, online: <https://www.tu.berlin/en/kuk/research/projects/current-research-projects/the-restitution-of-knowledge>.

²⁷ Apoh, *Revelations of Domination*, p. 252.

²⁸ Rüdiger Schaper, “Einweihung des Ethnologischen Museums Europas Macht über die Geschichte”, *Der Tagesspiegel* (22 September 2021), online: <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/europas-macht-uber-die-geschichte-4279693.html> (accessed on 6 September 2023). Translation by the authors.

²⁹ Quoted in: Jochen von Bernstorff and Jakob Schuler, “Wer spricht für die Kolonisierten? Eine völkerrechtliche Analyse der Passivlegitimation in Restitutionsverhandlungen”, *ZaöRV*, 79 (2019), pp. 553–577 (556).



in favour of the restitution of African cultural assets and set up a commission to draw up a roadmap for such a restitution.³⁰ One important result was the restitution of 26 cultural materials to the Republic of Benin in 2021, whereas the sword of Oumar Tall was given to the Museum of Black Civilisations in Dakar only on loan in 2019. In 2021, an official agreement between the German and the Nigerian states was signed concerning the Benin Bronzes held in German museums. As of now, both European countries and individual museums have entered into a competition with regard to the speed of the restitution processes. Fast returns merit symbolic capital, while “provenance research” is often framed as an excuse for not restoring artefacts quickly enough.³¹

The debate continues, however; new programmes for provenance research are being set up in Germany, for example the German Lost Art Foundation’s 2018 addition of “colonial contexts” funded by the German federal government and the states³² (albeit with rather meagre resources, contrary to the lavish ones emphasised by federal politicians), and joint research programmes and new networks are mushrooming.³³ As yet there is no overall strategy because cultural policy in Germany is not organised on a federal level – many cultural assets from colonial contexts are in municipal ownership, for example the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum in Cologne and the Reiss-Engelhorn Museums in Mannheim. Many African cultural materials from the colonial era are also privately owned or in non-publicly run collections, such as mission museums or artists’ collections. Owing to the complex museum landscape in Germany, it is difficult to give a total number of African cultural materials in German museums – the Humboldt Forum alone has 75,000 cultural materials from Africa in its holdings, while some scholars speak of a total of two million items in the whole of Germany.

What becomes evident from these findings is that the field is rapidly expanding in Germany with regard to new institutions, new funding possibilities and new agendas – also on the side of German foreign policy. Activists continue to put pressure on the ethnographic museums and speedy restitution has become a moral obligation. From the dichotomy

³⁰ Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy, *Report on the Restitution of African Cultural Heritage: Towards a New Relational Ethics* (Paris: Center for Art Law, 2018), online: <http://restitutionreport2018.com/> (accessed on 28 January 2022).

³¹ This was already observed in 2018 by Andreas Schlothauer, “Die Restitutionsdebatte in Deutschland als postkoloniale Legende: Die Rolle der Medien”, *Kunst und Kontext*, 15 (December 2018), pp. 42–58 (55).

³² Online: <https://www.kulturgutverluste.de/Webs/EN/Foundation/Basic-principles/Statute/Index.html>.

³³ Most visibly, the permanent addition of a department for “colonial contexts” at the German Lost Art Foundation (with funds for provenance research) in 2019, the German Contact Point for Collections from Colonial Contexts by the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media (Staatsministerin für Kultur und Medien), the Minister of State at the Federal Foreign Office for International Cultural Policy (Staatsministerin im Auswärtigen Amt für internationale Kulturpolitik), the Cultural Affairs Ministers of the Länder, the Länder Senators for Cultural Affairs and representatives of the municipal umbrella organisations in 2019. Networks of scholars have also been newly founded, like the “network colonial contexts” founded in 2020, online: <https://www.evifa.de/en/about/fid-projects/network-colonial-contexts> (accessed on 28 January 2022) or the “working group on colonial provenance research” within the Association for Provenance Research, online: <https://www.arbeitskreis-provenienzforschung.org/arbeitsgruppen/ag-koloniale-provenienzen/> (accessed on 28 January 2022).



inherent in “re-stitution”, the German holders of the cultural material need a receiving side. In the current restitution debate the term “communities of origin” is used for this – and since 2021 the term “countries of origin” has been added to it.³⁴ In a recent literature review of the most important German newspapers, Leonie Benker observes that these are seldom quoted – the majority of voices in the restitution debate in Germany are representatives of institutions (mainly ethnological museums), German politicians, activists and academics (some positioned in more than one of these categories).³⁵

b) Recent momentum in the restitution debate in Ghana

In Ghana the restitution debate has been rekindled. Shortly after Ghana’s independence, however, claims for the restitution of cultural materials abroad ranked quite highly, demands were made and a few objects were returned. For instance, in 1961, after Ghana became a Republic, during a state visit, Queen Elizabeth II returned five Asante cultural materials (two chairs, two stools and an umbrella) from the Royal Collections to the then president, Dr Kwame Nkrumah, for museums in Ghana.³⁶

The two stools were used by Asante queens but were illegally taken away by the British to London. Apart from that, occasional returns have been made in response to demands made by Asante kings. In 1985, a kudoku (casket), a brass vessel that was used to keep gold dust and precious ornaments belonging to King Kofi Karikari, the tenth Asante king in the 19th century, and had been taken as booty by Lord Robert Baden-Powell, was returned by his family to Ghana. These cultural materials are all currently exhibited at the Prempeh II Jubilee Museum in Kumasi.

In October 2021, the IFG 5 conveners organised and moderated a public roundtable discussion at MIASA with the film-maker Nii Kwate Owoo and other scholars on the question of cultural materials from Ghana in Western museums in light of ongoing debates on issues of restitution. With the screening of Nii Kwate Owoo’s 1970 film titled “You Hide Me!”³⁸ the long history of engagement by African intellectuals was addressed and connected to the active restitution demands made by the late King of Kpando, Togbui Dagadu VIII, to the Ethnological Museum of Berlin. During the discussions, the need for public outreach and education in the various local languages was stressed. Other issues that came up were the need for European countries to repair the damage caused to the African continent.

³⁴ That this “black box” proves to be difficult to overcome in practical issues is addressed by Bernstorff and Schuler, “Wer spricht für die Kolonisierten?”.

³⁵ Leonie Benker, “Koloniales Erbe und deutsche Erinnerungskultur: Die Restitutionsdebatte und ihre Fortläufer in deutschen Medien (2018–2020)”, *Baessler Archiv Band*, 67 (2021), p. 52. We thank Susann Baller for bringing this article to our attention.

³⁶ See: Martin Bailey, “King Charles’s ethical dilemma over looted objects in the Royal Collection”, *The Art Newspaper* (12 June 2023), online: <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2023/06/12/king-charless-ethical-dilemma-over-looted-objects> (accessed on 6 September 2023).



In Ghana, the debate on restitution has only gained a new dynamic during the last few years, and has become more visible with new funding initiatives, such as the Open Society Foundation's support,³⁷ and with new institutions in Ghana such as the Pan African Heritage World Museum in Winneba. On 6 May 2021, during the sod-cutting ceremony for the construction of a Pan African World Heritage Museum, the President of the Republic of Ghana, H. E. Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, announced that the museum would "provide a natural residence and resting place for *a//* the looted cultural artefacts of our continent which are housed in foreign museums and which will be returned to us come what may".³⁸ On 23 May 2021, he reiterated the demand for return in his opening speech during the official opening of the 4th Ordinary session of the 5th Pan African Parliament: "We must intensify our efforts in retrieving our looted cultural treasures which are being housed in the museums of the nations that stole them from us and making money for them instead of for us. Come what may, whatever the obstacles, we must get them back."³⁹

Already a year before this, in 2020, the Ghanaian Minister of Tourism had inaugurated the President's Committee on Museums and Monuments, a 12-member committee for which President Akufo-Addo appointed Nana Oforiatta Ayim and the Institute of Arts and Knowledge (ANO) as coordinators. The Ghanaian curator Nana Oforiatta Ayim, also curator of Ghana's first and second pavilion at the Venice Art Biennale of 2019 and 2022, has become an important voice in the restitution debate in the international realm. She delivers talks in museums in Germany as well as in countries on the African continent.⁴⁰ The President's Committee on Museums and Monuments was expected "to investigate radical new ways of presenting narratives, as well as engaging communities from across social divides in Ghana to properly represent them in their museums" and "also propose new policies for the governance and organization of the Ghana Museums and Monuments Board (GMMB)".⁴¹ In 2021, a report produced by the presidential committee made precise

³⁷ The Open Society Foundation pledged to spend \$15 million on the issue of restitution of cultural material from colonial contexts for a period of five years in 2019. "Grant making will put Africa's needs and priorities at the forefront and may include support for grassroots organizations, coalition building, litigation, public monitoring, and expert convenings with African scholars, cultural and creative figures, spiritual leaders, policy officials, and others", online: <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/newsroom/open-society-pledges-support-for-african-cultural-heritage-restitution> (accessed n 28 January 2022).

³⁸ Association of African Universities, "Sod-Cutting Ceremony of the Pan African World Heritage Museum", (5 May 2021), online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LjCZUoFz33g> (accessed 20 November 2021); our emphasis.

³⁹ Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, "Pan African Parliament: Official opening of the 4th Ordinary session of the Fifth Parliament", (24 May 2021), online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1f5ycgulcr0> (accessed on 20 November 2021).

⁴⁰ For example, at "Open Restitution African" in November 2020, online: <https://openrestitution.africa/restitution-dialogues-with-nana-oforiatta-ayim-ghana/>. For a more comprehensive overview see online: <https://www.nanaoforiattaayim.com/talks/>.

⁴¹ "President's Committee on Museums and Cultural Heritage inaugurated", *Ghana Today* (3 November 2020), online: <https://ghanatoday.gov.gh/news/presidents-committee-on-museums-and-cultural-heritage-inaugurated> (accessed on 28 January 2022).



recommendations for repatriation and preconditions in Ghana; that is, changing the legal basis and creating participatory practices were proposed.⁴²

Apart from the national and regional museums in Ghana there are also active palace and community museums such as the Manhyia Palace Museum at Kumasi and the Osimpam Heritage Centre in Winneba funded and stocked by the traditional authority; private museums and galleries such as the Nubuke Foundation, the Bisa Abrewa Museum, the Artists Alliance Gallery and the ANO Gallery; the Museum of Natural and Cultural History, as well as university museums such as the Institute of African Studies Teaching Museum and the Museum of Archaeology at the University of Ghana (cf. Fig. 3). Many museums in Ghana are in the process of restructuring in terms of infrastructure. Some of the public museums have been renovated, notably the USSher Forts Slavery Museum and the Volta Regional Museum which the fellows visited. The existing National Museum Gallery, which was meant to be one of the galleries (temporary exhibition gallery) of the original National Museum structure, was closed to visitor for major renovation from 2015 until it was reopened in 2022. After 65 years of independence, the original National Museum structure located behind the existing gallery still stands uncompleted for use and its purpose unknown to many Ghanaians. The National Museum, which was started by Ghana's first president, Osagyefo Dr Kwame Nkrumah, had a good number of galleries and storage space among other facilities. In 2018, the Ghana National Museum mounted an exhibition titled "The Architectural Heritage of Ghana" and among the exhibits on display were plans of the original drawings of the museum structure linked to the existing gallery and a photo of Dr Kwame Nkrumah presenting the model of the museum to the then British Secretary of State for the Commonwealth. When completed it was intended that it would house a number of Ghanaian cultural materials that would be returned.⁴³ New private museums are in the process of being constructed such as the already mentioned Pan African Heritage World Museum, which is the brainchild of Kojo Yankah, a former member of Parliament in Ghana. The vision of this museum is "to curate, preserve and communicate the history, ideals, philosophy, and cultural heritage of people of African descent within a 21st-century context of social, economic and political development".⁴⁴ The project has received the support of government and has been endorsed by UNESCO, artists, heritage practitioners, the media and Pan Africanists. At the launch of the Pan African Heritage World Museum in September 2020, President Akufo-Addo expressed the government's support of the project which falls in line with his

⁴² Presidential Committee of Ghana's Museums and Cultural Heritage, *A New Chapter: Ghana's Museums and Cultural Heritage* (Accra: ANO Institute of Arts & Knowledge, 2021), online: [https://ghana-heritage-future.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/Museum+Report+\(v.3\).pdf](https://ghana-heritage-future.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/Museum+Report+(v.3).pdf) (accessed on 28 January 2022).

⁴³ Getrude Ankah Nyavi, "Iconic architecture on show at National Museum", *Graphic Online* (15 December 2018), online: <https://www.graphic.com.gh/events/ghana-news-iconic-architecture-on-show-at-national-museum.html> (accessed on 6 September 2023).

⁴⁴ "Global Leaders convene for the Launch of the Pan-African Heritage World Museum", *Pan-African Council* (12 September 2020), online: <https://www.panafricancouncil.org/global-leaders-convene-for-the-launch-of-the-pan-african-heritage-world-museum/>.



“Beyond the Return Initiative”, which was launched at the end of 2019. The restructuring of museum infrastructure in the country is one of the capacity-building strategies for receiving returned cultural heritage, although a lot more needs to be done across the country. In March 2022, the Ministry of Tourism inaugurated a 22-member Focal Team on Reparation and Restitution of Illegal Trafficked and Stolen Cultural Heritage and Artifacts.

The return of the African diaspora has been widely publicly discussed in Ghana, resulting in numerous projects that have sprung up such as the Ghana Joseph Project, UNESCO Slave Route Projects, the Pan African Historical Theatre Festival (PANAFEST), and heritage tourism to the slave castles in Ghana, among others. Similarly, the “Year of Return, Ghana 2019” commemorated 400 years of the arrival of the first enslaved Africans in Jamestown, Virginia, involving many Ghanaians and promoting heritage tourism.⁴⁵ Beyond the return of the “global African family” is the return of African cultural materials, which has drawn increasing interest in recent years but is still largely unresolved when it comes to concrete restitution, return, repatriation and reparation, the 4Rs.

III. The Field of Restitution

Against the background of the different dynamics in the restitution debate in Ghana and Germany, we first briefly introduce the case study and then continue to position it within the broader field of restitution and the interest groups identified.

a) The restitution claim from Kpando and recent research

In October 2015 the late King of Kpando, Togbui Dagadu VIII, made an official written request for objects described as “Akpini royal regalia” to the German ambassador in Ghana, who received a delegation from Kpando (including Wazi Apoh of the University of Ghana who hails from the area). The cultural materials are currently held by the Ethnological Museum in Berlin. In June 2014, Apoh was shown these objects during his Volkswagen Foundation postdoctoral archival research in Berlin.⁴⁶ He mentions “ivory side blown horns with human jaw bones, royal smocks, head dresses, and royal drums”.⁴⁷

In 2018, at a conference on restitution held at the University of Ghana and organised by MIASA, Togbe Opeku VI, chief of Kpando-Agbenoxoe and regent of the Kpando Paramount Chief Palace, Ghana, gave an input.⁴⁸ At the closing conference of the IFG 5

⁴⁵ Some have criticized the commodification of commemoration and the alteration of historical narratives that erased African complicity from the slave trade. Cf. for example, Ibrahim Sundiata, “Sixteen-Nineteen and the Myth of Return”, *Transition*, 130 (2020), pp. 133–145. See also online: <https://ghanafact.com/2019/12/fact-check-does-2019-mark-the-400th-anniversary-of-the-start-of-the-trans-atlantic-slave-trade>. We thank Susann Baller for bringing these articles to our attention.

⁴⁶ Apoh, *Revelations of Domination*, p. 241, 261.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 261.

⁴⁸ “Issues of Restitution and Repatriation of Looted and Illegally Acquired African Objects in European Museums”, MIASA, University of Ghana (13–14 December 2018), online: <https://www.ug.edu.gh/miasa-africa/content/international-workshop-issues-restitution-and-repatriation-looted-and-illegally-acquired>.



conference in December 2021, Togbui Dake IV, Togbui Opeku VI, Augustin Atitse, Kusame Ekpe, and Togbui Kodzoga, a representative of the regent chief and representatives of the Bisiaku family, were also present and spoke publicly. While the museum in Berlin seems to be open to restitution and, according to the information given by a museum staff member, replied to the demand to the Ghanaian Embassy in Berlin in 2015, the case was pending during a prolonged search for a new paramount chief of the Akpini Traditional Area that was accompanied by considerable conflict between the involved parties. In March 2022, Okpekpewuokpe Dagadu IX was enstooled and with a delegation that included Apoh paid a courtesy visit to the German ambassador in Ghana during which the issue of the restitution of the regalia in question was followed up. The need for the creation of an Akpini Historical Museum and Cultural Centre in Kpando was also stressed during this visit.⁴⁹ This request – like the previous one made in 2015 – reached the Ethnological Museum in Berlin via official channels, as the museum disclosed during a visit of the two conveners of the IFG 5 in September 2022. The willingness of the museum to retribute was made explicit; however, the fact that there were human remains attached to the regalia, which most probably hailed from areas other than Kpando (most likely Ashanti), necessitated in the view of the Ethnological Museum’s lawyers an official endorsement by the Ghanaian national authorities. In 2023, the Akpini people contacted national Ghanaian institutions (like the Commission for Restitution and Reparation). The case has thus moved to a bilateral national level. Concrete wishes for the way the return should take place have been voiced by the Akpini people, for example they should be present at the museum when the cultural material leaves it. In addition, as these materials left Kpando through Lomé (today Togo) the return path should follow that same route.⁵⁰

b) Identifying interest groups⁵¹

In the restitution case in Kpando, IFG 5 identified a plethora of interest groups with varying agendas (cf. Fig. 1 and Appendix).⁵² At the centre of our research stood various meetings

⁴⁹ Online: <https://otecfmghana.com/2022/05/akpinifia-pays-courtesy-call-on-german-ambassador/>.

⁵⁰ Kodzo Gavua (Head of the Focal Team on Reparation and Restitution) at the conference “Restitution, Museums, and Cultural Policies in West Africa”, MIASA, University of Ghana (22 June 2023), cf. Eric Nana Yaw Kwafu, “MIASA hosts Conference on Restitution, Museums, and Cultural Policies in West Africa”, *Modern Ghana* (6 June 2023), online: <https://www.modernghana.com/news/1240688/miasa-hosts-conference-on-restitution-museums.html> (accessed 7 July 2023).

⁵¹ In order to stress that all groups involved have their own interests and agendas, we decided to use the term “interest group” instead of “stakeholders” or other terms that imply the neutrality and even naturality of the entities involved. Osadolor has shown how interest groups are made by the restitution debate (in his example of the Benin sculptures); cf. Osarhieme Benson Osadolor, “The Benin Sculptures. Colonial Injustice and the Restitution Question”, in: Thomas Sandkühler, Angelika Epple and Jürgen Zimmerer (eds.), *Geschichtskultur durch Restitution: Ein Kunst-Historikerstreit* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2021), pp. 207–222.

⁵² While the IFG 5 officially worked from September to December 2021, the identification of interest groups and individuals continued afterwards and is still ongoing. Due to the sensitive nature of the restitution process and the cultural material involved, trust needed to be built up between some actors and not all information was made available at once.



and discussions we had with representatives from Kpando. While these representatives are what Western museum discourse would term “source communities” our encounter with them showed that they were involved in ongoing disputes about who rightfully represents them.⁵³ With the coronation of Dagadu IX in March 2022, a 40-year-old litigation case which was also about history was finally settled.

When Western museum representatives seek to involve “source communities” the impression is that they have a somewhat idealised and essentialist idea of who these are. When we met with the regent chief of Kpando, residing in Accra, the meeting started by citing the Ghanaian constitution. The creation and re-creation of chieftaincies were and are highly contested, especially in areas without strong central authority. The Akpini State was formed by Dagadu IV in 1928 and officially recognised in 1932 by British colonial decree.⁵⁴ Historiographic literature shows that this process was highly political and a means for Dagadu IV to consolidate his position in the area.⁵⁵

However, the field of restitution involves many more interest groups, ranging from the museum infrastructure in Ghana and Germany, to the respective national governments, to funding agencies like the Open Society Foundation, to the German Lost Art Foundation and international organisations like UNESCO. Civil societies are also active in this field and scholars from various disciplinary backgrounds take part. The IFG 5 therefore visited a number of museums in Accra and Ghana as a whole. We also did fieldwork at an international

⁵³ Cf. Vincent Amedzake, “The Battle is Over, we are one Akpini State”, *GhanaWeb* (11 September 2020), online: <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/The-battle-is-over-we-are-one-Akpini-state-Torgbui-Kweku-Ayim-Committee-to-chiefs-1057246>; “32 Years Chieftaincy Issue Ends in Kpando”, in: *Peace FM* (24 October 2017), online: <https://m.peacefmonline.com/pages/local/news/201710/332551.php?storyid=100&> (accessed on 3 February 2022). In this prolonged chieftaincy dispute “history” was used as a means to achieve legitimacy. (“The committee observed that the dispute was multifaceted and deeply rooted in acrimony, antagonism and bad faith which had led to the distortion of historical fact and genealogical evidence and therefore called on the elites from the Akpini State to seize the opportunity to document the history of the Akpini State.”) This points to the fact that “source communities” are not ahistorical entities, cf. Hauser-Schäublin, “Provenienzforschung”. In the case of Kpando (or more correctly the “Akpini traditional area”) the absence of a paramount chief until March 2022 underlines this caveat.

⁵⁴ Cf. Wilson K. Yayoh, “Ethnographic Research, Local Power Brokers and the Political Recognition of Colonial Ewedome, British Mandated Territory, 1914–1930s”, *Contemporary Journal of African Studies*, 3, no. 2 (2016), pp. 39–70 (58–61). For the institution of chieftaincy in current Ghanaian politics, see J. Kingsley Adjei, “The Role of the Chieftaincy Institution in Ensuring Peace in Ghana from the Pre-colonial Times to the Present” (2013), online: <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/THE-ROLE-OF-THE-CHIEFTAINCY-INSTITUTION-IN-ENSURING-Adjei/9c14593d7a063a7f842367f344a321c99fde7570>; Isaac Owusu-Mensah, “Politics, Chieftaincy and Customary Law in Ghana’s Fourth Republic”, *The Journal of Pan-African Studies*, 6 (2014), p. 261; Lord Mawuko-Yevugah and Harry Anthony Attipoe, “Chieftaincy and Traditional Authority in Modern Democratic Ghana”, *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 40, no. 3 (2021), pp. 319–335.

⁵⁵ “In Ewedome, as the article has shown, there were local power brokers who stood to benefit from the policy of amalgamation. Such influential leaders saw the policy of amalgamation as an opportunity for mobilizing connections to consolidate their own political positions. Although the British colonial government had a broad commitment to indirect rule, the precise objectives and outcomes tended to vary in different regions because local power brokers were able to influence the terms and conditions” (Yayoh, “Ethnographic Research”, p. 67).



conference on restitution, “The Long History of Claims for the Return of Cultural Heritage from Colonial Contexts” organised by the German Lost Art Foundation in November 2021.

Many of these encounters and visits were filmed by Martin Doll, a member of IFG 5 and a scholar in Media Studies. These films form part of the interactive documentary project “Epistemologies of Restitution” which is available with open access.⁵⁶

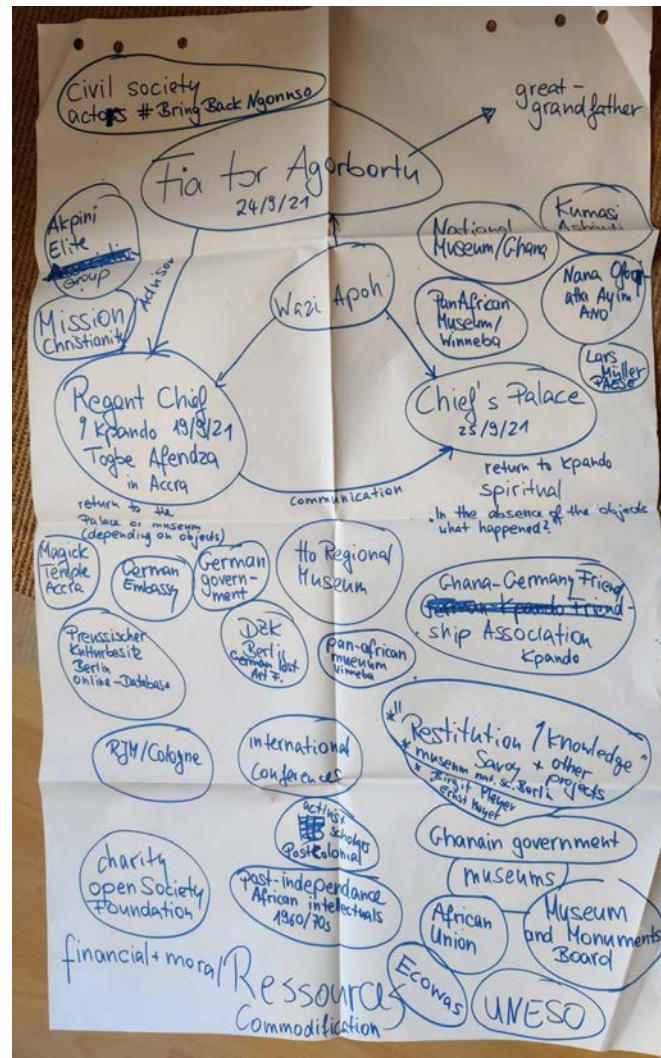


Figure 1: Interest groups identified by IFG 5 in the Kpando restitution case as compiled during the duration of the official Fellowship (September–December 2021) (cf. the updated version in the appendix)

⁵⁶ See online: www.thinking-about-restitution.org. The “links” (in both a literal and a figurative sense) on the webpage, between e.g. the different interview recordings, found footage material and images of sites of memory [Pierre Nora (1998), *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998)] are understood as an offer to go beyond dichotomies, to challenge a “differentialism”, that would “maintain the purities” (e.g. by opposing stable “indigenous forms of knowledge” to “western forms” etc.) [Helen Verran, *Science and an African Logic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 32]. Instead, the film project aims at putting thinking in relations into action. This allows the viewer to follow different paths according to their interests inside the thematic landscape of the project. This will also lead to different results depending on the relations which will be realised.



(i) Interest groups in Ghana

In September 2021 the IFG 5, facilitated and accompanied by Wazi Apoh, travelled to Kpando and met with chiefs and Elders of the Akpini Traditional Council, among others Togbui Dake IV and Togbui Opeku VI, in the Palace, where a three-hours conversation mentioned in more detail below took place. They – as well as their Regent Chief in Accra whom we also visited – made it very clear that they wanted their property to “return” from Berlin to the palace in Kpando. During our conversation they mentioned the horn, a drum, and a stool but also stressed that there might still be more items in German museums from Kpando, all of which should be returned to them. They told us that they still pray to them. When it started raining during our meeting, they insisted that it was through the power of the ancestors. They claimed to be still connected in spirit.

The vast majority of the discussion was in English (and that was a courtesy by the interlocutors), while only few parts (around 10%) were in Ewe. The Ewe parts were, however, crucial in understanding the cultural and historical background of the explanation given in English. An on-site translation was provided by our Principal Investigator Apoh, while the Ewe parts were later transcribed and translated into English by Hope Dekorn (Assistant Lecturer at the University of Education Winneba) and re-interpreted and corrected by Kokou Azamede (IFG 5 fellow and Ewe native speaker).

To give an example for the multilingual setting from the very beginning of the meeting:

Wova le mía fim be yewoaḍe foto kple video ne mɔḍeḍe li, ne mɔḍeḍe li. Nu si ta wobe yewoaḍee la, edze be míanya gake mava nye kuxi na mí oa? [...] Abe alesi ke ametsitsiawo gblɔe la, míe- ḍe mɔ be wo ne ḍe foto kple video gake ma va nye kuxi na mí oa?

They are here to use (steal from) us by asking if they may take pictures and record videos of the event. We need to know the reason why they want to take pictures and to record. [...] As the Elders said, we allow them to take pictures and to record videos, but we wonder if this will have a negative impact on us.⁵⁷

After some debate, the assembled Chiefs and Elders agreed that the session could be filmed.

Furthermore, the Chiefs and Elders were clear in insisting that all cultural material should not be put on display at any other museum in Ghana, be it the Pan African Heritage World Museum in Winneba or the National Museum in Accra.

The request for the return of the cultural material was connected to the recognition of the following histories, turning around central themes in the narratives shared at the Kpando palace: the isolation camp for a disease called Kotekpor in which people from the region were forcefully detained, injected to die and never to return; the active role of

⁵⁷ See also online: <http://thinking-about-restitution.info/index.html#top>.



Dagadu III protesting against this practice; the power of his predecessor who was recognized by the Germans as a powerful king; the role the missing regalia played in the exiling process of Dagadu III in 1914; the grief of his being exiled and the power of his regalia. Finally, the return of Dagadu III from his exile in Cameroon in 1915.

As this brief numeration of topics suggests, restitution is about much more than the material “return” of the cultural material. It is about the recognition of the things that happened in the past.

When we visited the palace and listened to the oral accounts about the German colonial time, we became part of this recognition-process. We actively asked about the encounter of the people with German colonial rule and the cultural material from that time that are in Germany to this day. Out of our delegation meeting with the Chiefs and Elders in the palace of Kpando three were German. In the course of the meeting, it became clear that the speakers were addressing these Germans as representatives of “Germany”. Togbui Dake IV expressed this very clearly:

And we, the people of Akpini are saying: “We want these things back, that is why we never kept quiet. Because of the relationship between us. We respect the relationship, that you took these things away and have kept them safely, be good enough, to let these come back, as evidence of that strong relationship between us”.

Here, a dichotomous vision with regard to the side where the cultural material resides presently becomes visible. When they addressed the German members of the IFG 5 as “you”, they generalized about Germans and Germany, or even the West/Global North. This became even more evident, when a younger man present in the palace spoke up and said: “What is happening here? Look at Europe, it is beautiful... We need our things back”. The tone changed after his intervention and Togbui Dake said that they were now awakened, the absence of the regalia had possibly indeed caused harm and could have accounted for problems, such as chieftaincy issues and lack of infrastructure in Kpando. The German members of the IFG 5 had become representatives of Germany, as the German ambassador, to whom the restitution claim was addressed in 2015 had been before.

While the voices of Chiefs and Elders from Kpando are surely crucial for understanding the local dynamics of the restitution claim from Kpando, we contextualized them in a broader “field of restitution”. As mentioned earlier, one of the IFG members also made a field research trip to Kumasi in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. However, while this allowed deep insights into the museum landscape in Kumasi, our follow up research on the human jaws attached to the Kpando horn and which are said to be those of Asante people, interrogation did not offer much further information. Intriguingly, rather than asserting any memory on precolonial conflicts with Kpando, interlocutors insisted on their own, Asante-based restitution claims.



Unfortunately, the setting of our research in Kpando, which clearly focused on the Chiefs and Elders, also did not allow to further explore other local perceptions on restitution in Kpando. However, in October 2021 IFG 5 fellow Kokou Azamede visited several Christian communities and Churches in the Volta Region (Anyako, Keta, Ho, Peki, Akapfu and Amedzofe) which had been under German colonial rule before the First World War. In these places, the North German Mission Society (Norddeutsche Mission; Bremer Mission) had been working since 1847, decades before the advent of formal German colonial rule. He noted that in a number of churches he visited (e.g. Peki, Amedzofe) some worship tools in use were still from the German missionary period. It became equally clear during his conversations that in many former German mission stations memories of the missionaries were positive, the names of individual missionaries are still being remembered.

According to Azamede's findings, many members of the local communities were not aware of any cultural material of their predecessor having been taken to Germany by missionaries and others. The King of Peki, Ngoyifia explained for example, that "the missionaries were afraid to approach or touch traditional cult objects, so much so that they would not dare take them away". As to the question of return/restitution of cultural material originating from the Ewe communities and taken to Germany by missionaries, Azamede received the clear answer from a church Elder in Anyako that bringing such pre-Christian-era cultural materials back would be "dangerous" for the communities. He suggested they would better be kept in Accra. Another argument against bringing back cultural material such as formerly sacred stones was their alleged ineffectiveness in the present and future. They are considered to have no effect anymore because nobody worships them anymore after the community's conversion to Christianity, and therefore such cultural material would not be claimed back. While these assertions are, once more, not representing everyone's perspective, even more so as research interlocutors were all part of religious communities which had been strongly influenced by the North German Mission Society, these additional insights still demonstrate how complex and manifold the "field of restitution" is, and that there is not one interest group, but many.

(ii) Fieldwork in an international conference on "The Long History of Restitution"

IFG 5 witnessed the challenges inherent in the academic, administrative, activist and political dealing with "restitution of cultural material" when observing the virtual conference "The Long History of Restitution" (17–19 November 2021). It was organized jointly by the German Lost Art Foundation with the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz and the Research Center for Material Culture of the National Museum of World Cultures, the Netherlands.⁵⁸ Such conferences are part of the "field" of restitution and the named conference served as an example.

⁵⁸ Online: <https://www.provenienzforschung-niedersachsen.de/termin/herbstkonferenz-deutsches-zentrum-kulturgutverluste-long-history-of-restitution/>.



Aiming to give an overview of restitution cases since the 18th century from around the world but not exclusively addressing historians, a rather instrumental understanding of 'history and historiography' of restitution became evident already in the conference's Call for Papers. The organizers not only asked for the motives of past restitution cases but also wanted to know: "Does restitution really always mean decolonization? And what can we learn from the history of protests and reclamations?" The hope, if not expectation, that "history" could teach something that might be "relevant" for the betterment of the present and, most of all, the future was clearly expressed. The ancient debate about *historia magistra vitae* was, in one way or another, mirrored by some participants who were speaking in a strictly normative voice, expressing not only their dissatisfaction about past and present occurrences related to the "slow" progress towards "complete" restitution, but also their expectations about the effects returned cultural material will have on the cultivation of a national identity in a given African state.

The conference began with high-profile "greetings" from then German State Minister for Culture, Monika Grütters who lauded her institution for the "work over the last four years", like financing research of museum holdings, the establishment of guidelines for museums dealing with cultural material from colonial context, and the organization of debates. Speaking as a politician of the then outgoing coalition-government, Grütters showed herself convinced that "a good basis has been laid for further closer cooperation with the 'source communities'".⁵⁹

The keynote speech by Noelle Kahanu, who was introduced as a native Hawaiian, was decidedly a mixture between academic contribution and a political statement of an activist about a shared future through joint efforts of healing and *aloha* (love). She took stock of the "sea change in relations with the concerned indigenous communities and museums and universities over the last years," as seen by "much closer cooperation" or "apologies offered" for past injustices. Speaking partly a Hawaiian language that the larger part of her audience did not understand, Kahanu underlined that a "search for intergenerational traumata requires the cognizance of inequality for researchers of indigenous communities," thereby hoping to bring justice and to bridge the past and the present. The process of healing of what has been broken also requires for Kahanu the involvement of the "ancestors as active part of that process as a process of forgiving" for a "growing together in the future".

The individual panels then discussed concrete cases of restitutions from the 18th to the 20th century and analysed them with regard, for example, to debates about "authenticity" or the hierarchization of cultural material, i.e. the (growing) importance according to the "relevance" they are given in postcolonial/national debates. In these discussions at times the stark differences between individual epistemic interests were noticeable when, for example, historians eagerly wanted to analyse the motives for past restitution claims,

⁵⁹ Translation by the authors.



whereas activists were focused on their present political goals and their assumptions about the future. These differences evidently hampered the conversation.

At the final roundtable (19 November 2021) two black women were placed in the center: Nana Oforiatta Ayim (Ghanaian curator) and Nadja Ofuatey-Alazard (Dekoloniale Berlin), with the moderator (Stefan Koldehoff) and the official government representative of the German Contact Point for Collections from Colonial Contexts (Marcus Hilgert) on the one side and Albert Gouaffo (University of Dschang/Cameroon) and Barbara Plankensteiner (MARKK Hamburg) on the other side (cf. Fig. 2). A well perceivable but precariously addressed clash occurred between Oforiatta Ayim and Ofuatey-Alazard. The latter – in the position of the activist outside institutions – called for speedy restitutions (implicitly accusing the museums of being too slow or not committed enough), while Oforiatta Ayim asked for time, speaking from the perspective of a person in Ghana who among other things coordinated Ghana’s presidential committee on Museums and Cultural Heritage. When asked about the state of the restitution debate in Ghana, Oforiatta Ayim stressed she was no official representative of Ghana, but mentioned the Kpando case in connection with Wazi Apoh and the University of Ghana,⁶⁰ as well as another case by the Asantehene. In the Kpando case Oforiatta Ayim pointed to the fact that representatives from Kpando voiced their claim.

In this moment the dichotomies of the field of restitution scrambled. While Ofuatey-Alazard called for fast restitutions without delay, Oforiatta Ayim stated Ghana needed time to prepare. German ethnological museums are under pressure to produce fast restitutions, because public opinion suspects delays in the restitution processes as reluctances to retribute. A Ghanaian restitution expert asking for time was an unexpected position and showed that the struggle within Germany might have overlooked these.

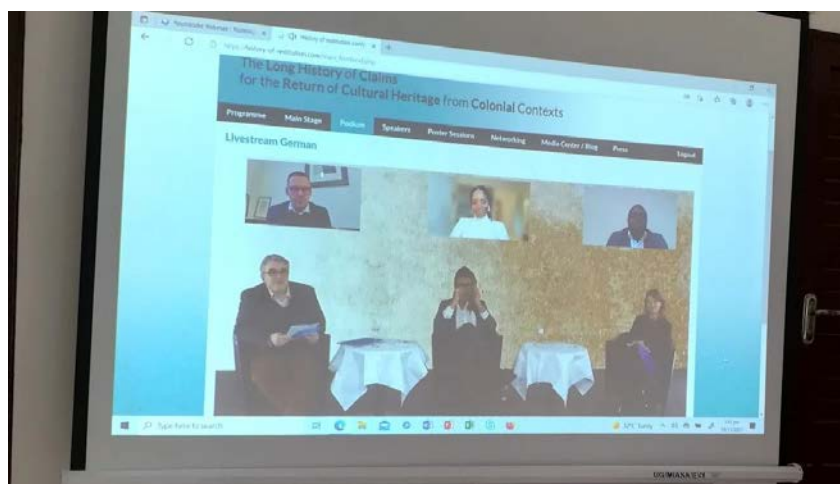


Figure 2: The Long History of Restitution panel for the roundtable discussion as screened at MIASA (Photo by Stefanie Michels 2021)

⁶⁰ In fact, a delegation of our Fellow group had interviewed her just a few days before the conference took place.



However, in a German newspaper article about the roundtable, this was not addressed at all. On the contrary, a dividing line was drawn between Albert Gouaffo, Barbara Plankensteiner and Markus Hilgert, which from our observation was empirically not grounded at all.⁶¹

While Nana Oforiatta Ayim had made the point explicit that she did not want to speak as a representative of Ghana, but mentioned two cases: the one in Kpando and the one of the Ashanti, the German newspaper article claimed her voice as one of the “Herkunftsgesellschaften” (“source communities”) and ascribed an emotionality to her that we – as observers of the conference – did not perceive neither during the conference nor during an interview which we had conducted with her just a few days earlier. In our interview, she rather stressed that she enjoyed conversations and cooperation within Ghana and other African countries, but found that German museums and the general public often put her in positions that were not appropriate, for example becoming a representative of so-called “source communities”. Although this was not the case in the Round Table at the Conference, it happened, in the article published about it in Germany.⁶²

The newspaper article ends with a quote from Gouaffo that “we wait for answers from Europe”. The dichotomy of a “we” (as Africans) versus “Europe” was thus reinstated. The discourse of restitution seems to evoke the subject positions of “victim” and “perpetrator”. Many scholars have cautioned that these categories are simplified and asked for a recognition of gray zones.⁶³ Refuting this dichotomy must not imply refuting social and political responsibility and considering subject positions in structures of inequality.⁶⁴

(iii) Museums in Ghana

As part of the field work and for better appreciation of the museum landscape in Ghana, the fellows visited and surveyed a number of public and private museums and galleries: the regional Museum in Ho, the National Museum in Accra (where we were also able to speak

⁶¹ “Auf den Vorschlag von Albert Gouaffo, dass die Beweislast künftig umgekehrt werden müsse und die Museen nur noch Objekte behalten dürften, wenn der Nachweis gewaltfreier Aneignung erbracht sei, reagierten in der Runde weder Barbara Plankensteiner vom Hamburger Museum am Rothenbaum noch Markus Hilgert, Generalsekretär der Kulturstiftung der Länder und Leiter der jüngst eingerichteten Kontaktstelle für Sammlungsgut aus kolonialen Kontexten” (Neither Barbara Plankensteiner of Hamburg’s Museum am Rothenbaum nor Markus Hilgert, Secretary General of the Kulturstiftung der Länder and head of the recently established Contact Point for Collections from Colonial Contexts, reacted to Albert Gouaffo’s proposal that the burden of proof should be reversed in the future and that museums should only be allowed to keep objects if proof of non-violent appropriation had been provided), in: Nicola Kuhn, “Kolonialismus und Restitution: Der Schmerz bleibt”, *Tagesspiegel* (20 November 2021), online <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/der-schmerz-bleibt-4290754.html> (accessed on 31 January 2022). Translation by the authors.

⁶² “Afrikanische Stimmen würden häufig wie Fußnoten behandelt, ergänzte Nana Oforiatta Ayim bitter” (African voices are often treated like footnotes, added Nana Oforiatta Ayim bitterly), in: Kuhn, “Kolonialismus und Restitution”. Translation by the authors.

⁶³ Simo, “Formen und Funktionen des Gedächtnisses”.

⁶⁴ Cf. the theory of the “implicated subject” by Michael Rothberg: “Within that terrain we find multiple implicated subject positions, multiple figures of implication” [Michael Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* /Stanford, Conn.: Stanford University Press, 2019), p. 12].



to the curators), the site where the Pan-African Museum in Winneba is planned, two museums at the University of Ghana main campus (Institute of African Studies and Department of Archaeology and Heritage Studies) as well as some of the forts and castles on the Ghanaian coast, the Nkrumah Memorial Park and Museum in Accra and various art galleries in Accra (like the Nubuke Foundation and the Artists Alliance) and community museums like the Osimpam Heritage Centre in Winneba and museums in Kumasi such as the Manhyia Palace Museum, Prempeh II Jubilee Museum, Ghana Armed Forces Museum and Okomfo Anokye Sword Site.

The museums in Ghana are generally silent on conversations on restitution of cultural materials from colonial contexts. There is no centralized body to champion these national conversations although at the private level, some heritage professionals and individuals talk about it. The Ghana Museums and Monuments Board (GMMB) is responsible for Ghana's museums and cultural heritage and for that matter has an important role to play in conversations on restitution. At the National Museum, the fellows discovered from the curators that there has been occasional return of Ghanaian cultural materials from individual private collectors that are not publicly announced.

One of the active players in the field of restitution is the Manhyia Palace of the Asantehene in Kumasi. At the time of the visit in November 2021, the Manhyia Palace Museum was being expanded to accommodate returned Asante cultural heritage. In interviews by IFG 5 members with museum curators and some Chiefs and Elders in Kumasi these made clear that they are aware of some looted Asante cultural objects in European museums and private collections specifically in Britain, Germany and the United States of America. Among the looted heritage identified are the gold head of Nana Kofi Karikari, gold weights, kente, the golden axe, traditional drums, royal tools, swords, state chairs, rings and bracelets, and beads. Moreover, the Chiefs and Elders in Kumasi also categorically mentioned that they want the return of all their cultural heritage abroad back to the Manhyia Palace Museum and not to any other site. The curator of the museum explained that various Asante communities face socio-cultural challenges as a result of the absence of their cultural heritage from their soil. According to the curator, the museum will be renamed "Asante Living Museum" after completing the construction of the building and exhibit cultural items from the entire Asante area. The curator acknowledged that the Asante King, Otumfuo Osei-Tutu II would make the request for restitution on behalf of all Asantes and be responsible for further steps. Interviewees also mentioned that as a way of compensation for the long loss, western museums need to assist in building community and district museums as well as support in training professionals for their management in order to facilitate public education and instil confidence in the values transmitted by Asante cultural objects.



Figure 3: Showcase in the Museum of Archaeology (University of Ghana), photo: Stefanie Michels (2021)

At the Institute of African Studies Teaching Museum, IFG 5 members noticed an impressive exhibition about Akan gold weights was on display. The gold weights were bought in Germany and donated to the University of Ghana by the late Oyeeman Wereko Ampem II who was a Ghanaian traditional ruler, a businessman and a former chancellor of the University.

The Artists Alliance Gallery (cf. Fig. 4) is a private institution, established by the artist Ablade Glover. At the gallery, cultural productions were on sale on three stories - ranging from paintings and sculptures to cloth, jewellerys and antiquities.



Figure 4: Display of cultural materials at the Artists Alliance Gallery (Photo: Stefanie Michels, December 2021)



In spite of the fact that all the museums can exhibit returned cultural heritage, it is anticipated that with the renovation of the national museum and the construction of this new Pan African museum, these museums would likely be the places where most of the restituted African heritage would be exhibited. During the sod-cutting ceremony of the Pan African Museum in Winneba in May 2021 the President of the Republic of Ghana, H.E. Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo said that it will “provide a resting place for all the looted artefacts housed in foreign museums in Europe and elsewhere”.⁶⁵ There are proponents for the return of cultural materials to the state to be housed in a centralized museum. However, there are also those who think that they should be returned to local communities because there was no state at the time they were taken.⁶⁶

IV. MIASA conference on restitution, December 2021

IFG 5 finally organized a closing workshop/conference with the title of our research project: “Restitution, Return, Repatriation and Reparation (The 4Rs) in Africa: Reality or Transcultural Aphasia?” which took place at the University of Ghana on December 13–14, 2021. The aim was to introduce our work to a larger, mostly academic audience and discuss related arguments and claims for restitution and cross them with perspectives from Kenya, Cameroon or Senegal. We invited both delegation from Kpando and scholars from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds in order to place in particular the Kpando-case study in the context of the dynamic field of the “4Rs” and the restitution debate as a whole. The Call for Paper of this conference posed the pertinent questions: “How can we do justice to the plurality of narratives and agendas put forward in a concrete case? Who are the interest groups? In which contexts and what kind of agendas is the restitution issue voiced? Who are the respective audiences of these voices?”

In his keynote-speech, Wazi Apoh claimed restitution of the Akpini regalia when he debated the “captivity of looted objects” in contexts where they do not belong originally (i.e. German museums) and related about “our active advocacy of today for the restitution”. Apoh also was transparent about his “motivation” when asking “Why Kpando, Why Germans/ Germany?” He underlined that his grandfather “Elder Stephen Apoh, a first generation of German mission-educated Africans is ‘my inspiration’”. He mentioned and abnegated the often-heard argument that there are supposedly no facilities to house the cultural material demanded to be returned and that there are allegedly no experts in Africa to cater for the cultural material. Apoh dismissed such arguments and such Western discourse on colonially looted African cultural material, but demanded that “action for the future is needed”.

⁶⁵ Association of African Universities, “Sod-Cutting Ceremony”, cited in Martin Doll’s introductory text to his interactive documentary, online: <http://thinking-about-restitution.info/index.html#content5-1o> (accessed on 13 July 2023).

⁶⁶ Cf. Wazi Apoh and Andreas Mehler, “Vom Rande aus betrachtet: Das Humboldt-Forum und die Restitutionsdebatte”, *WeltTrends*, 179 (2021), pp. 54–58.



Apoh related the recent history of the claims for a return of the cultural material since 2015 and showed a list of the cultural materials looted from Kpando by German colonial officials and told the audience that the Ghanaian Minister of Foreign Affairs and other ministers received a copy of this letter “from the source community”. He saw such actions as a way of decolonizing the past. Apoh’s talk addressed the “4R” (restitution, return, repatriation and reparation) – and with regard to the fourth R (Reparation), he became clear by using a metaphor: “If a fire destroys the things of a thief’s house, what happens?” He drew the attention to the fact that out of the 15 items from the above-mentioned list only five are still materially present in the collection of the Ethnological Museum in Berlin. Reparation for the destroyed or misplaced cultural materials seemed to be what he implied.

On the way forward Apoh demanded that a new Dagadu must be enstooled soon – and since a delegation from Kpando was present, his urge was addressed directly to them. The “next Dagadu must lead the charge with the support of the database that scholars ... have prepared. It will be his role to pursue the claim for the restitution.” Apoh suggested setting up a task-force to clarify the questions he had raised during his keynote.

Unique to the conference was the focus on one case. It showed that restitution might narrow complex histories. On the part of some African-based scholars and interest groups, the perception of the “field of restitution” as being dichotomously structured led to essentializing statements about “Europe” and “Africa”, dividing a clear cut “us” from a clear-cut “them”. George Abungu for example made a strong case that “Africans” and institutions like the African Union and national governments should be those who organize what he called the “restitution tsunami”. Other participants also highlighted the necessity for a “collective African approach”.

There was divergence and convergence of the contributions to be observed. The conference also showed where the dichotomous vision clashed with the case of Kpando and other concrete examples, like the #BringBackNgonso campaign from Cameroon. Some contributions connected the restitution case of Kpando to the wider colonial history of the area and brought out pertinent questions, e.g. about the intellectual networks within which the Dagadu III operated (Michels), the connection of the missing regalia to missing people some of whom were identified by name (Azamede) and also the notion of how conflictual and processual notions of “community” in Ghana were over time (Ntewusu). In the film presentations (Doll, Njobati) some of the interest groups involved in concrete restitution cases were brought to the fore. The restitution case thus evoked a deeper acknowledgement and recognition of the past and the historical interest groups on its own terms and not as mere arguments for a moral judgment in the present.

The delegation from Kpando, which took part in the conference, also addressed the audience, voicing their demands for restitution. What became clear in these encounters, including with the delegation from Kpando, was that the conference was perceived as a platform to voice and underline their demands.



IV. Conclusion

The case of Kpando has made visible the multiplicity of interest groups involved. The dichotomies in the restitution debate go beyond vocabularies and words. They mark moral positions. Moral positions divide between “good” and “bad”. They can help to point to injustices and have indeed moved the debate about restitution to a debate of public concern in the global North. Moral judgements become weapons in the politics of power. However, they do not always help on a practical level and might re-inforce stereotypes by maintaining dichotomies. As Valentin Mudimbe has shown, it was the mere dichotomous construction of Africa as “other” that formed the basis of the Western project of colonization.⁶⁷ While most agree on the moral judgement that colonial rule was unjust, based on violence and race power the political conclusions drawn from this differ. One example is that the “good” position of fast restitution – as demanded by activist groups in the West – might not be suited for Kpando. The Kpando people needed time (e.g. to enstool a paramount chief and solve their chieftaincy issues). The focus of IFG 5 on the Kpando case and the interaction with the Chiefs and Elders from Kpando likely speeded the process of the enstoolment. The Akpini Elite Group played an active part in settling disputes in the community.⁶⁸ However, interest groups in Ghana have added a demand for “reparation” to the “restitution” debate. In his keynote speech to the conference of IFG 5 in December 2021 Wazi Apoh pondered about this possibility for the cultural material from Kpando that is no longer found in the museum storage of the Ethnological Museum in Berlin. Ghana’s focal team founded in May 2022 is not only on “Restitution” but explicitly in the title also “Reparation”.⁶⁹ Its head, Professor Kodzo Gavua summed up its aims as follows: “Restitution and reparation would help in repairing the damage that the actions of the colonial masters caused. We will work with other African nations to form a strong voice in pushing for our demands”.⁷⁰

Among scholars, activists, museum officials and politicians in Africa and Europe a field expertise might well develop in the future into what could be tentatively called cultural “restitution governance” and its regulatory framework. The term “restitution governance” has hitherto been used in Africa and formerly socialist countries in Eastern Europe with regard to the “land reform” and the land “restitution” to formerly disempowered and expropriated people or entire communities,⁷¹ but seems apposite also to the realm of cultural materials.

⁶⁷ Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*.

⁶⁸ “Members of the Akpini Elite Group were very instrumental in the processes leading up to the coronation of the new Chief”, according to their own website, online: <https://www.akpinistate.org/coronation/>.

⁶⁹ Its official title is “Ghana Focal Team on Reparation and Restitution of Illegal Trafficked and Stolen Cultural Heritage and Artifacts”.

⁷⁰ Business Ghana (15 April 2022), online: <https://businessghana.com/site/news/general/260788/Ghana-seeks-reparation-of-stolen-artifacts> (accessed on 28 July 2023).

⁷¹ Stan Stevens (ed.), *Indigenous Peoples, National Parks, and Protected Areas: A New Paradigm Linking Conservation, Culture, and Rights* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014); Christiaan Beyers, “Land



Until quite recently, it seemed that one of the major tasks of such “restitution governance” could be the clarification of the juridical status of the cultural material acquired in colonial contexts.⁷² However, in several debates and conferences IFG 5 members noted that by now (2021) a rather explicit consensus among Western scholars has been reached that the acquisition of cultural material in a “colonial context” is per se to be understood as a “Case of Illicit Appropriation”, to use the UNESCO terminology – an illegality that leaves no space for juridical debate about an alleged “precarious status”, but requires “restitution” of the looted item; irrespective of any laws at the time of the “acquisition”. This consensus thus proves right the assumption by von Bernstorff and Schuler from 2019 about the “neuen postkolonial geprägten Diskursformation”⁷³ that is no longer willing to debate the laws of the past but requires acting in the present.

Evelien Campfens and Isabella Bosza, two anthropologists who worked as provenance researchers in Western museums for several year stated in 2022: “Given the limitations of reconstructing facts in the distant past, we suggest shifting attention to the values and meanings attributed by communities to the objects at stake today.”⁷⁴

On the one hand this might be perceived as a way forward, because it would make “provenance research” superfluous. This clashes with the demand for “recognition” on the other hand and with the important insights of African and Asian as well as global history from the past sixty years: As a result of decolonization, the various African historiographies also resorted to the dichotomy “resistance” and “collaboration”. Frederick Cooper questioned the usefulness of such morally charged dichotomies in 1994 and emphasized the obfuscation effect that such binary categories have for the actual balance of power on the ground.⁷⁵ Kofi Takyi Asante also questions these dichotomies with regard to the ambivalent relationship of the “merchant princes” with the colonial state in Ghana in the 19th century:

Restitution’s ‘Rights Communities’. The District Six Case”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 33, no. 2 (2007), pp. 267–285; Ramona Elena Scriban, Liviu Nichiforel, Laura Gianina Bouriaud, Ionut Barnoaiea, Vasile Cosmin Cosofret and Catalina Oana Barbu, “Governance of the Forest Restitution Process in Romania: An Application of the DPSIR Model”, *Forest Policy and Economics*, 99 (2019), pp. 59–67.

⁷² Cf. Charlotte Guichard and Bénédicte Savoy, “Acquiring Cultures and Trading Value in a Global World. An Introduction”, in: Bénédicte Savoy, Charlotte Guichard, Christine Howald (eds.), *Acquiring Cultures: Histories of World Art on Western Markets* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), pp. 1–8 (2).

⁷³ Bernstorff and Schuler, “Wer spricht für die Kolonisierten?”, p. 556.

⁷⁴ Evelien Campfens and Isabella Bozsa, “Provenance Research and Claims to Bangwa Collections: A Matter of Morality or Justice?”, *VerfBlog* (5 December 2022), online: <https://verfassungsblog.de/provenance-research-and-claims-to-bangwa-collections/> (emphasis added).

⁷⁵ Frederick Cooper, “Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History,” *The American Historical Review*, 99, no. 5 (1994), pp. 1516–1545, cf. at book length a couple of years later: Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*.



The fundamental roles that they played in the emergent colonial order necessitate revisiting the contentious ‘collaboration versus resistance’ debate which reduced responses to colonial rule to either opposition to colonial domination or betrayal of one’s country.⁷⁶

On the part of the people, societies and countries affected by colonial rule much more, for example recognition and reparation is involved than the mere material return of cultural goods, as was underlined for example during the conference on the “Long History of Restitution” and our own field-research in Kpando. The debate therefore is beyond the scope of museums.⁷⁷

Yet, Western museums are the institutions under moral pressure as they are increasingly in the public spotlight, also causing politicians to get involved in the debate. For Western museums, fast restitutions seem to be the way out of this pressure. There is the risk that restitution becomes another benevolent gesture by the West⁷⁸ and the restitution debate might re-ify and re-inforce stereotypes rather than reversing them.⁷⁹

Furthermore, the commodification and academic mainstreaming of restitution might distribute resources in an asymmetrical manner once again. When George Abungu described restitution as a “tsunami” he evoked the metaphor of an event that occurred elsewhere with dire consequences for regions unaware of the initial event. The IFG 5 and MIASA initiating research on “restitution” could also be perceived as being part of this “tsunami”. Through the interviews we did we initiated and re-activated debates in Ghana, especially with regard to the case in Kpando. When Wazi Apoh halted a planned second field trip of some fellows of our group to Kpando, we could interpret this as his way of shielding people there from the “tsunami”.

While the restitution debates – especially in the political realm – rests on and reproduces dichotomies, the concrete example showed that interest groups (and their specific goals) are not easily – and especially not concretely – brought into such clear-cut positions. In fact, a complicated network of alliances and shifting positions becomes visible (but would need more in-depth research for a full picture).⁸⁰ Restitution cases are extremely

⁷⁶ Kofi Takyi Asante, “Nested Patriotism: Revisiting Collaboration, Resistance and Agency in Colonial Ghana”, *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 33, no. 3 (2020), pp. 347–364. We thank Zoe Klos for bringing this article to our attention.

⁷⁷ This is the criticism Osadolor brings forward in the case of the “Benin Dialogue Group”: “It must be analyzed in the context of colonial injustice and how to deal with colonial history, though the international host institutions may be opposed to this demand” (Osadolor, “The Benin Sculptures”, p. 221).

⁷⁸ Achille Mbembe, “Of African Objects in Western Museums: Award of the Gerda Henkel Prize 2018 (Gerda Henkel Lecture)” (Münster: Rhema, 2019); see also online: https://www.gerda-henkel-stiftung.de/en/recipient-in-2018?page_id=99597.

⁷⁹ Stefanie Michels, “Von einem Tsunami, einer niedergerissenen Mauer und einem Bumerang. Literaturessay”, *Soziopolis* (24 May 2022), online: <https://www.sozio-polis.de/von-einem-tsunami-einer-niedergerissenen-mauer-und-einem-bumerang.html>.

⁸⁰ Cf. a self-reflection on being an “insider-outsider” in the Humboldt-Forum: Margareta von Oswald, *Being Affected. Shifting Positions at the Ethnological Museum of Berlin* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2022), pp. 77–95.

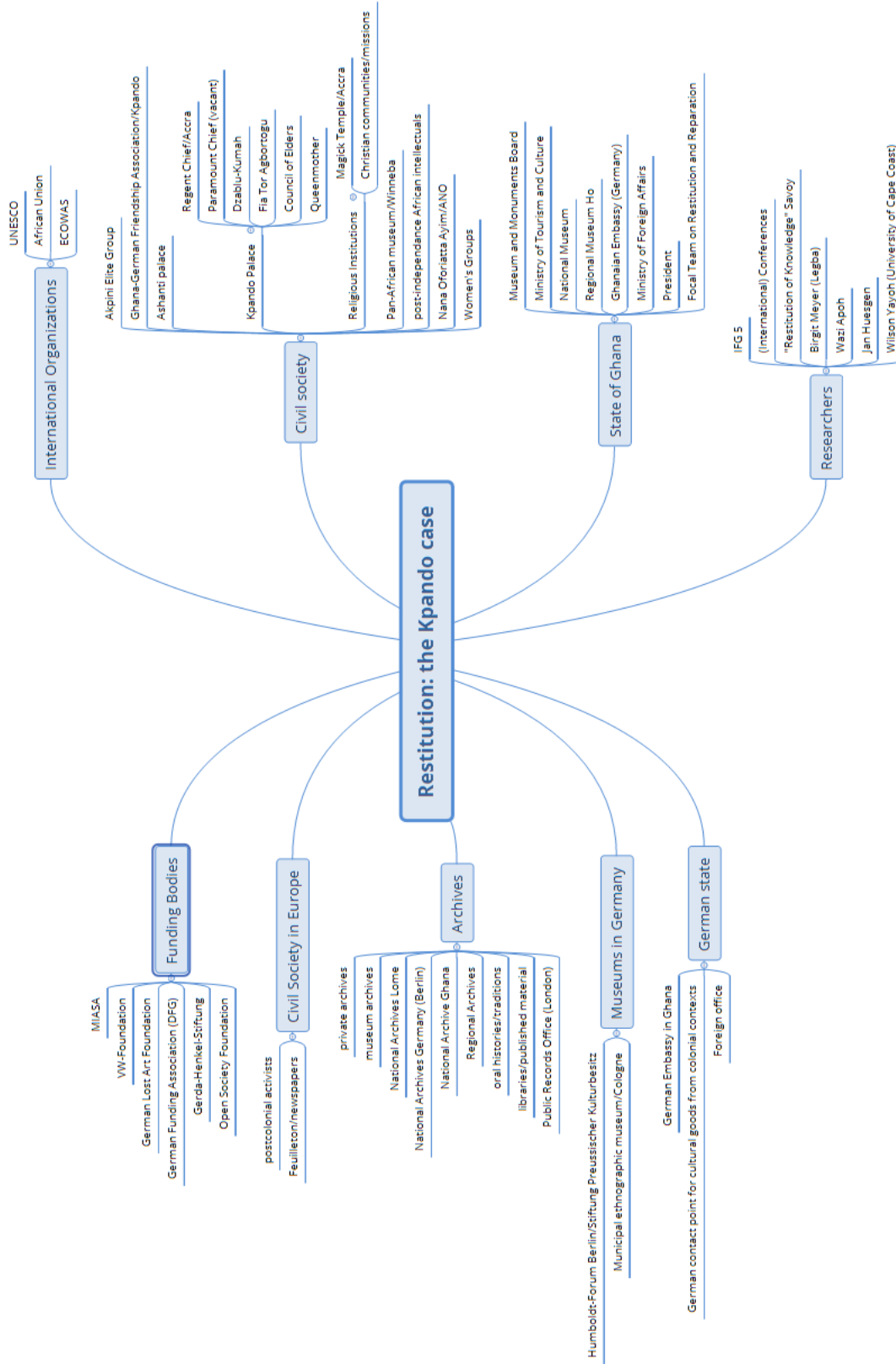


sensitive with regard to the question whose positions and interest are decision takers aware of and which ones contradict each other – at times information is actively withheld by gate-keeping. Restitution diplomacy cannot be undertaken without a deeper knowledge of the field of restitution, especially since commodification is accelerating (with regard to funding organizations, reparation demands, expansion of the museum sector, tourism, as well as symbolic capital accumulation).



Appendix

The Restitution case of Kpando in its field







Biographical notes

Kokou Azamede is associate professor in the Department of German Studies of the University of Lomé. He was postdoctoral research fellow of DAAD (2010 and 2014 in Bremen), the Fritz Thyssen Foundation (2012-2013). His research interests are Postcolonial Cultural Theories (inter- and transcultural studies); German Colonialism, German Christian Missions, German colonial photography in West Africa. He created the website <http://kolonialfotografie.com/> for pedagogical introduction to the use of colonial images from Togo. He is the 2022 laureate of the Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm Award.

Martin Doll earned his PhD in Media Studies in Frankfurt/M. After two years as a post-doctoral fellow at the ICI Berlin, he was an Assistant Professor in the research project 'Aesthetical Figurations of the Political' in Luxemburg. Currently, he is Junior Professor for Media and Cultural Studies at the Heinrich-Heine-University Düsseldorf. He has published articles and book chapters on audiovisual historiography, politics and media, architecture as a medium, utopias and media. Further info: www.mdoll.eu/.

Gertrude Aba Mansah Eyifa-Dzidzienyo holds a PhD and an MPhil in Archaeology from the University of Ghana, Legon. She is currently a senior lecturer in the Department of Archaeology and Heritage Studies, at the University of Ghana. Her research focus is on museology, ethnographic studies and heritage issues. She has conducted research on the tangible and intangible heritage of the Talensi in the Upper East Region of Ghana. She serves as a curator of the Museum of Archaeology at the University of Ghana.

Stefanie Michels teaches at the Institute of Historical Studies at the University of Duesseldorf. She studied in Cologne and London and worked at the Universities of Cologne, Hannover, Frankfurt, Vienna, Heidelberg and Hamburg. Her research focuses on German colonial history, the global history of photography, regional history and imperial history, and African cultural goods in German museums.

Jakob Zollmann read history, philosophy, and law in Berlin, Paris, and San Francisco. He has taught at the University of Namibia where he also undertook research and at the Freie Universität Berlin, Germany. He was a visiting fellow at the German Historical Institute Paris and is researcher at the Center for Global Constitutionalism of the WZB Berlin Social Science Center. His research focuses on the history of international law and on the legal and social history of colonial Africa.

